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AUTHOR Wang, Margaret C.; Haertel, Geneva D.; Walberg, Herbert J.

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the defining features of school improvement programs. Twelve research-based programs that have been implemented for 5 or more years in at least 50 schools or for 3,000 students were analyzed. All have achieved national visibility. Eight of the programs focused on curricular reform and topics included: (1) Core Knowledge; (2) Different Ways of Knowing; (3) Foxfire; (4) Higher Order Thinking Skills; (5) the National Writing Project; (6) Paideia; (7) Reading Recovery; and (8) Success for All. The other four programs (Accelerated Schools, the Coalition of Essential Schools, Community for Learning, and School Development) were comprehensive models focusing on improving student learning in all subject areas. The programs are distinctive, but share the intention to increase learning through research-based practices. Researchers identified 54 practices among the 12 programs, and considered 26 practices strongly research-based. The programs have a variety of pre-implementation preparations and implementation requirements, and they vary in the amount of time and costs required for implementation. There is a great deal of information about many aspects of these programs, but there is a relative lack of information about their effects on achievement. (Contains 3 tables and 15 references.) (SLD)

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What Do We Know

Widely Implemented School Improvement Programs

By
Margaret C. Wang, Geneva D. Haertel, and Herbert J. Walberg

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Temple University Center for Research in
Human Development and Education
1301 Cecil B. Moore Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19122-6091
Tel: 800-892-5550
Fax: 215-204-5130
Web: http://www.temple.edu/LSS

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Widely Implemented School Improvement Programs

Federal and state policy makers and local school boards increasingly emphasize higher learning standards and school accountability. They want evidence of better goal setting, rational program choices to attain those goals, and documentation of results. A striking example is the November, 1997 U.S. House of Representatives Conference Report (105-390). In allocating special funds for comprehensive school reform, the conferees noted "the gains in student performance in a number of schools across the country that are using new comprehensive models for school-wide change covering virtually all aspects of school operations, rather than a piecemeal, fragmented approach to reform" (p. 97). The Report named 17 examples of such externally developed reform models, including the *Coalition of Essential Schools*, *Community for Learning*, and the *Modern Red Schoolhouse*.

In view of such concerns, we analyzed the defining features of such widely disseminated programs. We selected 12 research-based programs that have been implemented for five or more years in at least 50 schools or for 3,000 students. All of the programs aim to improve student learning and have achieved national visibility.

We sent initial and follow-up letters to program developers to solicit brochures, reports, and evaluations. In addition, we searched the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database to identify descriptive and research documents for each program. From several hundred research documents and project descriptions, we described, analyzed, or compared the 12 widely implemented programs. Table 1 provides a brief description of each program, and Table 2 provides a profile of program features.

Program Type

The 12 widely implemented reform programs are of two types: comprehensive or curricular. Comprehensive school reform programs focus on school governance and organization and may also include emphasis on revised curricular content. Curricular reform programs emphasize content in one or more academic disciplines.

Curricular Reform

As shown in Table 2, eight programs focus on curricular changes. They include *Core Knowledge*, *Different Ways of Knowing*, *Foxfire*, *Higher Order Thinking Skills*, the *National Writing Project*, *Paideia*, *Reading Recovery*, and *Success for All*. Unlike comprehensive reform programs, curricular reform programs can fit into conventional schools with minimal change. *Reading Recovery* and *Higher Order Thinking Skills*, for example, typically remove children from regular classrooms for needed instruction. *Different Ways of Knowing* infuses the arts, literature, and other activities into existing social studies courses without reorganizing schools. The *National Writing Project* delivers instruction within the prevalent departmentalized organization of high schools and as part of language arts instruction in elementary schools. *Core Knowledge* leaves about half of the school day for activities outside its scope. *Success for All* places students in homogeneous groups for reading instruction.

Curricular programs typically require educators to master or develop the use of program-specific materials and new teaching strategies. *Core Knowledge*, for example, supplies clear-cut content of instruction, but leaves lesson planning and material development to teachers; *Different Ways of Knowing* calls for knowledge of Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences; *Foxfire* requires investigations of local culture; and *Paideia* depends on skilled Socratic teaching. In contrast, *Higher Order Thinking Skills*, *Reading Recovery*, and *Success for All* provide the required materials and teaching procedures. The *National Writing Project*, *Foxfire*, and *Different Ways of Knowing* require teacher collaboration to develop new materials and lesson plans.

Comprehensive School Reform

Accelerated Schools, the *Coalition of Essential Schools*, *Community for Learning* (previously known as the *Adaptive Learning Environments Model*), and *School Development* focus on improving student learning in all subject areas using a comprehensive improvement framework. Characterized by broad goals, these programs change the conventional school's management and organization. They employ, for example, flexible scheduling and small learning communities that work together to create interdisciplinary curricula. They bring together parents, educators, students, and community members to define a coherent vision of the school. In some cases, these stakeholders are free to define their own vision. *Accelerated Schools*, *Community for Learning*, and *School Development*, for example, have specific parent involvement components. In

In other cases, such as the *Coalition of Essential Schools*, the school's vision is expected to be congruent with a set of clear principles.

Comprehensive school reforms promote schoolwide reconceptions of where learning takes place and how to measure it. For example, *Community for Learning* and *School Development* connect learning to the physical and psychological development of the child and link schools to medical, psychological, legal, and social services in a coordinated network. Teachers in the *Coalition of Essential Schools* and *Accelerated Schools* assess student learning in new ways, including portfolios and exhibitions.

Goals, Grade Levels, and Focus

Although the programs are distinctive, they share some common goals. As shown in Table 2, each of the 12 programs aims to increase learning through research-based practices. Most aim to expand the professional role of teachers, improve the culture and climate of schools and classrooms, and include family and community involvement.

The programs are most frequently implemented in grades K through 8. Nine are designed to educate all children in the general school population, although several have been widely implemented as inclusive educational programs that integrate students with special needs (e.g., students receiving Title I and special education services) with the support of specialist teachers.

The programs vary on their curricular emphases. Some stress learning and teaching in particular content areas such as reading, writing, language arts, history, or mathematics and science, while others stress critical thinking and study skills. Few do both.

Program Practices

Information on practices shown in Table 3 can facilitate program choices. Educators, for example, that are interested in a strong academic focus across curricular areas might select *Core Knowledge* or *Paideia*. These two programs, however, differ in the number and type of classroom practices they use. *Paideia* employs cooperative learning, didactic instruction, and teachers as learning facilitators. *Core Knowledge* is less directive concerning the classroom practices employed. For educators who are interested in using a coordinated academic and related services, *School Development* or *Community for Learning* are possible choices. *Community for Learning*, however, also has a strong academic emphasis that includes adaptive instructional strategies, varying grouping practices, cooperative learning, and one-on-one tutoring.

Of the 54 practices featured in the programs, 25 are more firmly grounded in research on what influences student learning (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993). The practices shown in Table 3 that are indicated with an asterisk have a substantial research basis.

As reflected in Table 3, there are some noteworthy differences across programs. The last row of Table 3 shows that programs differ in the number and types of research-based practices they employ. For example, *Foxfire*, the *National Writing Project*, and *Paideia* employ few research-based practices, while *Community for Learning*, *School Development*, and *Success for All* include many research practices. The comprehensive school reform programs employed an average number of 19 research-based practices compared to 11.4 for curriculum-focused reform programs. The greatest difference among these two types of programs is in the number of school organization and climate research-based practices they employ: comprehensive reforms use an average number of 5.7 such practices, compared to only 1.5 in curriculum-focused programs.

Community for Learning, *Reading Recovery*, and *Success for All* incorporate the following practices that are related to improved learning: frequent high-quality academic interactions among teachers and students; grouping practices, tutorials, and metacognitive strategies; and frequent assessments to improve learning. Other effective practices are those that stress positive, supportive learning environments, including high expectations for all students; frequent and positive social interactions among teachers and students; positive classroom and school climate; cooperative learning; and parent involvement. *School Development* employs these practices both to improve school climate and enhance student cognitive and affective outcomes. In contrast, *Reading Recovery* and the *National Writing Project* emphasize more specific instructional strategies.

Research-based practices may be important criteria for selecting programs. While the sheer number of research-based practices used cannot be regarded as the single measure of program effectiveness, it does provide evidence of the program's potential effectiveness if fully implemented.

Program Implementation Requirements

The programs specify a variety of pre-implementation preparations and implementation requirements. Some of the important program comparisons are as follows:

Use of specifically designed curriculum materials: *Core Knowledge*, *Higher Order Thinking Skills*, *Paideia*, *Reading Recovery*, and *Success for All* require the purchasing of specially designed instructional materials and teaching strategies.

Approach to program delivery: *Reading Recovery* and *Higher Order Thinking Skills* use pullout strategies which provide special instruction for targeted students, while other programs use inclusive approaches to classroom instruction.

Professional development focus: *Different Ways of Knowing* and *School Development* train teachers in new ways of thinking about teaching and learning; *Foxfire* and the *National Writing Project* provide teachers with new skills and pedagogies through workshops, networks, and institutes to ensure that teachers share their expertise with each other. The *Coalition of Essential Schools* engages school staff in discussions of why and how to teach. *Accelerated Schools* engages all stakeholders in discussions of the school's mission. *Community for Learning* provides data on degree of program implementation and student performance for staff to devise action plans to meet classroom- and school-level goals. These data-based improvement plans are revised on an ongoing basis based on student progress.

Amount of professional development: *Different Ways of Knowing* and *Success for All* rely on several days of professional development with follow-up activities. The *National Writing Project* employs a summer institute that lasts several weeks. *Reading Recovery* requires teachers to attend an entire year of graduate-level courses in residence at a university-based training center. *School Development* focuses on changing the culture of the school and spreading professional development over the years. *Community for Learning* employs a systematic professional development delivery system that provides three to four days of preimplementation training and ongoing data-based staff development targeted for individual staff.

Follow-up support: Support includes newsletters and teacher networks; technical assistance; extensive classroom follow-up, coaching, and group discussion; and the regular collection of new diagnostic and context-specific information on teachers and students. Each program engages in several types of follow-up support.

Accountability for implementation: In *Foxfire*, school sites measure implementation using their own methods. *Accelerated Schools* provides assistance to schools through self-assessment. *Community for Learning* employs a degree of implementation assessment measure to monitor implementation progress and plan staff support.

Structure of implementation process: *Community for Learning*, *Reading Recovery*, *School Development*, and *Success for All* require highly structured implementation, while the *National Writing Project* and the *Coalition of Essential Schools* have fewer clearly defined implementation steps.

Adaptability of implementation process: *Accelerated Schools*, *Community for Learning*, and *School Development* provide more flexibility in tailoring implementation to the school site. *Core Knowledge*, *Paideia*, *Reading Recovery*, and *Success for All* allow less flexibility.

Funding and Time Requirements

The programs vary in the amount of time and costs required for implementation. Specific dollar amounts needed for implementation vary among programs and specific sites, since they depend on school size, the amount of professional development required, and substitute teaching costs to cover teacher planning and professional development time. Prospective consumers can expect reform programs to provide information on the costs of training, additional staff requirements, curriculum materials, equipment required, and other fees. Among the programs that require substantial staff preparation costs are *Accelerated Schools*, *Community for Learning*, the *Coalition of Essential Schools*, *Higher Order*

Thinking Skills, *Reading Recovery*, *School Development*, and *Success for All*. The *National Writing Project* and *Foxfire*, on the other hand, require little additional cost. They rely heavily on teacher networks for staff renewal and dissemination. *Reading Recovery* requires a full year of university study for teachers in training. Most of the other programs require from three to ten days of professional development.

Conclusion

The following tables contain comparative information about the dozen most widely disseminated, externally developed reform programs. Educational policy makers and school staff seeking major educational improvements will probably consider these programs and their features. The analytic framework of features may prove useful in evaluating other programs, both externally developed and those originating in local districts.

Our research yielded about 300 program descriptions, implementation reports, and other documents about the programs. Though the tables contain much important information on comparative program features, a host of additional information is available, which we are recording on a CD-ROM to be made available though the Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success at Temple University Center for Research in Human Development and Education. It will allow educators to find further details about the programs, to weigh program features according to their own preferences and needs, and to make better decisions about programs to choose or formulate on their own.

Finally, we note a lack of information on perhaps the most important feature of the programs—achievement results. Ideally, such information would come from independent evaluators who have set up control-group experiments to contrast the progress of students in a given program with comparable students in conventional programs. Despite the attractive features and practices of the programs, and notwithstanding the thousands of schools in which they have been tried, evidence of whether the programs actually yield better learning is sorely lacking. The promise of funding by the 105th Congress to encourage scaled-up implementation of comprehensive school reforms may provide an opportunity for developers and evaluators to analyze program effects on student learning.

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Table 1
Program Abstracts*

Accelerated Schools (Hopfenberg, Levin, & Associates, 1993)
A comprehensive reform program that improves student learning through enriched curriculum and instruction, improved school climate, and school organizational changes based on stakeholder input (e.g., teachers, students, family, community).

Coalition of Essential Schools (MacMullen, 1996)
A site-based reform founded on nine principles that encourage students to think critically and use their minds well. Teachers facilitate learning through coaching and students demonstrate their skills through authentic assessment.

Community for Learning (formerly known as the Adaptive Learning Environments Model, Wang, 1992, 1997)
A data-based, comprehensive K-12 program that focuses on high academic achievement and positive student self-perception, and enhances schooling and life opportunities. The program includes a site-specific implementation planning framework that incorporates a schoolwide organizational structure, and a coordinated system of instruction and related services delivery.

Core Knowledge (Hirsch, 1993)
A curriculum that develops students' cultural literacy by providing important knowledge about history, literature, geography, math, science, art, and music.

Different Ways of Knowing (Catterall, 1995)
A reform that builds upon students' multiple intelligences and uses an interdisciplinary social science curriculum to strengthen students' verbal, mathematical, logical, social, and artistic skills.

Foxfire (Foxfire Fund, Inc., 1992)
A teacher network that promotes an active learner-centered approach to education and fosters frequent interaction between students and their local community.

Higher Order Thinking Skills (Pogrow, 1995)
A pullout program that develops students' higher order thinking skills using technology and Socratic methods to replace the drill and practice approach used in many Title I programs (grades 4-6).

National Writing Project (Smith, 1996)
A program designed to improve student writing by providing professional development opportunities to teachers and stressing the role of the teacher as expert.

Paideia (Adler, 1983)
A rigorous, liberal arts program designed to develop students' minds through a curriculum stressing classical works, didactic instruction, Socratic questioning, and coaching.

Reading Recovery (Pinnell, 1995)
A pullout program that provides one-on-one tutoring by highly trained reading teachers to early readers with reading problems so that they may read at grade level and continue improving without further remediation.

School Development (Comer, 1996)
A comprehensive program that unites the resources of the school, family, and community to promote holistic child development.

Success for All (Slavin, Madden, Dolan, & Wasik, 1996)
A program that stresses reading and language arts and helps schools and classrooms in preventing academic deficiencies and in intervening, as needed, to overcome problems. This program is based on the premise that all students can and should succeed, and utilizes homogenously grouped small-group instruction and one-on-one tutoring.

* A more detailed description of the programs listed in Table 1 can be obtained in Wang, M. C., Haertel, G. D., & Walberg, H. J. (1997). *Characteristics of twelve widely implemented educational reforms*. Philadelphia: Laboratory for Student Success.

Table 2
Program Features

Program	Accelerated Schools	Coalition of Essential Schools	Community for Learning	Core Knowledge	Different Ways of Knowing	Foxfire	Higher Order Thinking Skills	National Writing Project	Paideia	Reading Recovery	School Development	Success for All
Type of Reform												
Comprehensive Reform Program	x	x	x								x	
Curricular Reform Program				x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Goals												
Improve Student Learning	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Meet the Learning Needs of Students Placed At Risk	x		x				x			x	x	x
Foster Positive Student Perceptions			x			x					x	
Increase Student-directed Learning	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Increase Equity in Opportunity to Learn	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Restructure School Organization	x	x	x		x						x	
Increase Family Involvement	x		x		x	x				x	x	x
Increase Community Involvement	x		x		x	x					x	
Increase Access to Non-academic Services (e.g., medical, social)	x		x								x	x
Improve School Climate	x	x	x								x	
Enrich Curriculum and Instruction	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Redefine Relations Among Teachers, Learners, & Curriculum	x	x	x		x	x		x			x	
Expand Professional Roles of Regular Classroom Teachers	x	x	x		x	x		x			x	x
Students Served												
All Students	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x			x
Title I	x		x				x				x	x
Special Needs/Mild-Moderate Handicap			x			x	x				x	x
Young Readers with Reading Difficulties			x							x		x
ESL or Bilingual	x		x							x		x
Urban Students			x			x					x	x
Rural Students			x			x						
Grade Levels												
K-1										x		
K-6 (Elementary)	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Middle/Junior High School	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x		x	
High School		x	x			x		x	x			
Curricular Focus												
Reading	x				x					x	x	x
Writing					x	x		x				
Mathematics				x	x				x		x	
Language Arts/Literature				x	x	x			x			x
Science				x	x				x			
History and Social Sciences				x	x	x			x			
Fine Arts				x	x	x			x			
All Subjects	x	x	x								x	
Critical Thinking Skills and Learning Process	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x
Study Skills	x	x	x		x		x	x			x	x

Table 3
Prevalent Program Practices

Program Practices[1]	Accelerated Schools	Coalition of Essential Schools	Community for Learning	Core Knowledge	Different Ways of Knowing	Foxfire	Higher Order Thinking Skills	National Writing Project	Paideia	Reading Recovery	School Development	Success for All	Number of Programs Using
Classroom Practices													
* High Expectations for Students	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12
* Frequent High-Quality Academic Interactions Among Teachers and Students	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12
Active Learning	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	11
Constructivist Strategies	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	11
* Metacognitive Strategies		x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	x	9
Teacher as Facilitator	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x				8
* Student-Directed Learning		x	x			x		x		x	x	x	7
* Direct Instruction			x	x			x		x	x	x	x	7
* Small Group Instruction	x		x			x	x		x		x	x	7
* Frequent High-Quality Social Interactions Among Teachers and Students	x	x	x		x	x				x	x		7
* Cooperative Learning	x	x	x			x			x		x	x	7
* Positive Classroom Climate	x	x	x		x	x					x		6
Teacher Modeling of Attitudes, Behaviors, and Skills	x	x	x			x		x	x				6
Teacher Models Higher Order Thinking	x	x	x				x	x	x				6
Hands-on Activities	x	x	x		x	x		x					6
* Adaptive Instructional Strategies			x				x			x	x	x	5
* Peer Tutoring	x		x		x	x						x	5
* Tutoring-Teacher/Aide and Student			x				x			x		x	4
Heterogeneous Grouping	x	x	x									x	4
Use of Technology	x						x						2
Student Choice of Learning Activities		x				x							2
Multiple Intelligences					x								1
Homogeneous Grouping												x	1
Classroom Practices Featured	**15**	**15**	**19**	**3**	**11**	**14**	**12**	**10**	**11**	**10**	**12**	**14**	**146**
Curriculum and Assessment													
* Alignment of Curriculum and Assessment	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12
Attend to Foundation of Basic Skills	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	12
Learning Processes	x	x	x		x		x	x		x	x	x	9
Authentic Assessments	x	x	x		x	x		x	x		x	x	9
* Tailored to Student Ability and Academic Background	x	x	x		x		x			x	x	x	8
* Integration of Content Areas	x	x	x		x	x		x	x		x		8
* Tailored to Student Cultural Background	x	x			x	x				x	x	x	7
Challenging Academic Content	x	x	x	x			x		x			x	7
* Use of Individual Learning Plans			x							x	x	x	4
* Frequent Assessments			x						x	x		x	4
Multicultural Content				x									1
Curriculum and Assessment Practices Featured	**8**	**8**	**9**	**4**	**7**	**5**	**5**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**81**

[1]The list of practices was compiled from program descriptions prepared by the program developers. Practices that are marked were identified in the program developers' materials as key elements of their program.

*Program practices marked with an asterisk are firmly grounded in research on what influences student learning (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1993).

Table 3 (cont'd)
Prevalent Program Practices

Program Practices[1]	Accelerated Schools	Coalition of Essential Schools	Community for Learning	Core Knowledge	Different Ways of Knowing	Foxfire	Higher Order Thinking Skills	National Writing Project	Paideia	Reading Recovery	School Development	Success for All	Number of Programs Using
School Organization and Climate													
Teacher Collaboration on Content and Instruction	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	x	10
* Parent Involvement	x	x	x	x	x					x	x	x	8
School Restructuring	x	x	x		x				x		x		6
Consensus Building (to initiate and/or sustain program)	x	x	x	x							x	x	6
* Principal as Facilitator and Support Provider	x	x	x				x				x	x	6
* Community Involvement	x		x		x	x		x			x		6
Kindergarten	x		x	x							x	x	5
Prevention Oriented		x	x							x	x	x	5
Assess School/Program Strengths and Weaknesses	x	x	x					x				x	5
* Positive Schoolwide Climate	x	x	x								x		4
Flexible Scheduling	x	x	x						x				4
Shared School Vision	x	x		x							x		4
* Small Class Size	x					x			x			x	4
* Shared Decision Making on School Policies	x	x	x								x		4
Coordinated School-linked Services	x		x								x	x	4
Site-Specific Improvement Plan	x	x	x								x		4
Site-Based Governance	x	x									x		3
* Inclusive School			x								x	x	3
Pullout for Instruction						x				x		x	3
Encourage Action Research		x						x					3
School Organization and Climate Practices Featured	**16**	**14**	**15**	**5**	**4**	**3**	**3**	**4**	**3**	**4**	**15**	**11**	**97**
Number of Practices Featured	**39**	**37**	**43**	**12**	**22**	**22**	**20**	**19**	**20**	**21**	**35**	**34**	
Number of Research-based Practices Featured	**17**	**15**	**23**	**5**	**12**	**12**	**11**	**7**	**10**	**14**	**21**	**19**	

About the Laboratory for Student Success

The Laboratory for Student Success (LSS) is one of 10 Regional Educational Laboratories established by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) of the U.S. Department of Education. The LSS is comprised of an interdisciplinary team of experienced, talented, and practice-sensitive researchers, practitioners, and staff joined in the common cause of promoting student success.

The Laboratory for Student Success aims to provide assistance to schools in the mid-Atlantic region, including Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC, in their efforts to make significant improvements in achieving student success. The LSS scope of work is grounded in the belief that all children have the capacity to learn, including and especially those who, for whatever reason, are at risk of academic failure. With this in mind, the LSS has two major programs—Services to the Field and Applied Research and Development—that seek to: (a) discover ways to build on student potential and resilience; (b) expand the knowledge base on what helps students succeed; and (c) determine how newly developed knowledge can best be put into action in the classrooms.

Services to the Field

The Laboratory for Student Success Services to the Field component features four outreach services that not only gather and share information on the research base and state-of-the-art classroom practices, but also work with practitioners and professionals to use these success strategies in their schools and school districts. The four outreach services include: State-of-the-Art Seminars, What Works Workshops, Advanced Study Institutes, and On-site Professional Development and Technical Assistance.

Applied Research and Development

The Laboratory for Student Success researchers focus on a broad-based program of research and development that aims to: (a) identify effective educational practices and policies that are currently in use; (b) develop new strategies for efficacious classroom instruction; (c) design and implement caring school environments that foster educational resilience; and (d) demonstrate the feasibility and efficacy of a coherent and coordinated system of service delivery that connects families, schools, and communities in the service of children and youth.

Information

For more information about the Laboratory for Student Success, contact Cynthia Smith, Director of Information Services, at 800-892-5550, or access the LSS website at http://www.temple.edu/LSS.

Laboratory for Student Success
The Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at
Temple University Center for Research in
Human Development and Education
1301 Cecil B. Moore Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19122-6091